

ALL NEW ZEALANDERS WELL-HOUSED



Covid-19 Community Housing Sector 9 April 2020

Welcome to a Covid-19 newsletter from your sector body, Community Housing Aotearoa *Nga Wharerau o Aotearoa*.

In this issue - an update on sector issues raised for clarification, upcoming meetings for the sector, frontline staff at the heart of pandemic response, CHA guidance for your organisations, ways to reduce tenants' anxiety, and information for migrants and refugees.

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Update on sector issues



Shortly after we entered Alert Level 4, CHA put forward a shortlist of issues we heard from members seeking support and clarification. We are pleased to report back significant progress across these:

Move-ins during Level 4, procedural issues and safety protocols:

MSD issued [guidance](#) on pausing non-essential placements in transitional and public housing on April 1st. In our newsletter today CHA has released additional [guidance](#) (see article below) on safety

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considerations for providers. HUD has also addressed some related items in it's [Frequently Asked Questions](#) document updated today.

Rent arrears resulting from no evictions approach and issues of cash flow support for providers:

The latest information on the governments pause on evictions is on the HUD website available [here](#) and related information is in the [Frequently Asked Questions](#) document updated today.

Communal/shared facilities and ability to follow self-isolation protocols:

Providers with communal/shared facilities should contact HUD/MSD when they need to reduce numbers to adhere to isolation protocols. The direction from the Wellington Region District Health Boards provides some useful [guidance](#).

Contractors for essential services and resource-sharing across providers and Kainga Ora:

CHA is working with Kainga Ora on a process to access their essential services contractors for emergency repairs where you cannot source your own. Many questions centered on availability of whiteware and furnishing for empty units. While whiteware is now available, further advice from MBIE is pending regarding other required items. This should only be necessary for essential placements.

Availability of personal protective equipment (PPE) and appropriate use information:

CHA has released [guidance](#) on safety considerations for providers today including PPE. In general, should providers feel they require PPE to carry out their services, they should contact their DHB.

As many head into a long holiday weekend, I would like to express my support for all those front line workers across the community sector and public service who will have no break from serving those who require assistance. Thank you for the work you do, our communities are grateful for your efforts. Kia kaha.

Scott Figenshow, CHA Chief Executive

Upcoming meeting for housing providers

Providers are invited to a series of online Zoom meetings to share information and discuss issues you're experiencing.

These meetings will be held at 2pm on the following dates:

- **Tuesday 14 April**
- **Friday 17 April.**

Please contact CHA Senior Programme Manager [David Zussman](#) or Deputy Chief Executive [Chris Glaudel](#) for a Zoom link to the meeting you would like to attend.

These meetings are for community housing organisations delivering across the continuum and you do not need to be a member of CHA to attend.

CHA guidance for housing providers during Level 4

Community Housing Aotearoa has put together a [document](#) to consolidate information, contacts, resources and advice to help you in your day to day service delivery and decision making. It will be updated as new information is available and Alert Levels change.

We hope you find it a useful resource and welcome your contributions of additional content. Please contact Chris Glaudel at projects@communityhousing.org.nz or David Zussman at davidz@communityhousing.org.nz if you have any questions or additional resources to suggest.

As we are finalising this newsletter, just received more information on this topic. We will update our next edition of guidance with this additional resource from Te Pou o te Whakaaro Nui.

Te Pou o te Whakaaro Nui has put together a [guide for using](#) personal protective equipment (PPE), created specifically to help those working in NGOs in the areas of mental health, addiction and disability. The guide is available in various useful formats, including PDF, image and an accessible Word format.

HUD updated guidance and FAQ

The Ministry of Housing and Urban Development released an [update](#) to their 26 March guidance to housing and housing support service providers (includes providers of Housing First, Transitional Housing, Sustaining Tenancies, Community Housing and other accommodation and housing focussed support services) during the COVID-19 response period.

HUD also released an update to the [Frequently Asked Questions](#) document also originally published on 26 March.

Connections and community in the midst of crisis



Susan Jenkins, Executive Officer of Abbeyfield New Zealand, shares these two examples of local connections and kindness, which she says shows the strength of communities when help is needed.

Ginny, the housekeeper at Abbeyfield Hornby, Christchurch, decided to set up 'The Corona Cafe' for residents who miss going to the mall every day for their coffee fix. As residents sharing common areas of the home, they are all in the same bubble. They had their Grand Opening recently, complete with resident Vera as the waitress. The sun was shining and the mood was high, and Ginny received a round of applause at dinner. It was a great day.

(Photo of The Corona Cafe, above, by Virginia Clausen).

Meanwhile, at Abbeyfield Masterton the oft-repaired cooker finally broke down the day before lockdown started. Our amazing and well-connected committee member Jude Clark quickly organised a replacement (the last one!) from Noel Leeming and asked two local police officers from the neighbouring police station to help with loading it onto a trailer; a local electrician was on hand to install it and it was up and running so our housekeeper/cook could keep up the excellent service of providing meals for the 10 residents.

The full story and a photo of the stove being loaded is [available here](#).

More information about Abbeyfield New Zealand is [available here](#).

Staff at the heart of Monte Cecilia's pandemic support for tenants



“We’re not interested in just their rent, we’re interested in their health and wellbeing.”

That’s Bernie Smith, Chief Executive of Auckland’s Monte Cecilia Housing Trust, talking about what’s driving staff to continue working during a pandemic. It’s about maintaining a service that absolutely matters to the 300 whānau, including more than 800 children, living in the Trust’s 70 transitional homes and 230 community rentals dotted throughout the region.

Half of the Trust’s staff are working from home and the other half from the office, well-spaced out and observing health and safety protocols. Their ‘new normal’ involves keeping in touch with tenants by phone twice a week to check that they’re all right, if there’s been any change in their financial circumstances, and to make sure they are still able to put food on the table.

If tenants are considered vulnerable because of their age, health or for other reasons, or if they are not able to get to a supermarket to buy what their family needs, then Monte Cecilia’s staff work with them to arrange home deliveries or to connect them with foodbanks able to help out. They’re also being given a hand by regular truckloads of fruit and veg from the national food rescue charity [KiwiHarvest](#).

“The response from tenants has been phenomenal,” says Bernie Smith. “People have been really taken aback by the effort being put into their wellbeing.”

Trust staff are going to bat for any tenants or staff whose partners have lost their jobs as a result of the lockdown, contacting their employers to make sure they know about the Government’s wage subsidy. Monte Cecilia has also stopped pursuing any rent arrears or collecting debt resulting from wilful damage to its properties, for the duration of the pandemic.

“We’ll pick this up at the right time but it’s not the thing to focus on now. We’re dealing with some of the most vulnerable members of society, and these whānau need our support.”

The key to all of this support, says Bernie Smith, is the staff of Monte Cecilia.

“We can only do this because of the people who work at Monte Cecilia and the level of care they’re bringing to the work.

“In return, as a housing provider it’s important that we walk the talk and make sure our staff feel appreciated.”

Staff working in the Trust's office have been encouraged to have online Zoom meetings with colleagues regularly. These are not based on the teams they work in but, rather, are an informal chance to talk to others about how things are going for them, express their frustrations and anxiety, and work through any issues. A virtual tea room, in other words.

Bernie Smith says he also brought forward the annual pay review and gave staff a pay rise just before the lockdown took effect.

"When people feel cared about, that flows through into their work with tenants."

More information about Monte Cecilia is [available here](#).



Reducing tenant anxiety

By Bob Hardie, Ōtautahi Community Housing Trust

Community housing across New Zealand has moved into unknown territory due to the COVID-19 Alert level 4 lockdown. It is anticipated that this will be particularly relevant around the issue of tenant levels of anxiety.

As we all know community housing provides accommodation for a range of demographics. Not all tenants are vulnerable, and most will cope with the lockdown and any associated anxiety.

However, many tenants will have anxiety issues as a result of social needs and there is the potential for this anxiety to escalate the longer that we remain in lockdown. Hopefully the steps being taken in New Zealand now, enable us to minimise the lockdown period.

Community housing providers predicted the need to support tenants through this situation, particularly those vulnerable tenants, at an early stage. It is now clear that early actions taken by community housing providers were aligned and consistent.

Many of those actions are worth sharing as we move forward and face the growing potential of an escalation of tenant anxiety. It is beneficial to all community housing providers to share measures that effectively support tenants to manage behaviour caused by increased anxiety.

Initial methods to reduce tenant anxiety included the following suggestions, with the onus on consistency and open communication.

Initiate contact with all tenants by phone to ensure tenants are aware that their provider cares about them and their health and security. Take the opportunity during the conversation to update the database of important information including health status, next of kin, and social support contact numbers.

Establish the need for 'check in' calls and if necessary, create a call schedule to suit the requirements of the individual tenant. Reiterate the need for the tenants to report illness, and confirm the importance of self-isolating and social distancing for the benefit of both the nation and the individual.

The conversation should include a directive to look out for neighbours while adhering to the social distancing guidelines. Provide information on how to navigate to the social supports available by various government and NGO services.

Complete the call by outlining how communication with the provider will continue through the pandemic. These communication methods could be via:

- phone calls
- letters
- newsletters
- media platforms
- provider 0800 number.

Be sure to detail provider services that can and cannot be delivered, along with the assurance that updates will be given as and when they become available.

Communication is identified as one of the main successful controls for anxiety and many of the actions outlined above will be used during the lockdown for on-going tenancy management.

Additional methods advised by providers for anxiety control for day to day tenancy management under the lockdown include:

- provider well-being patrols
- early intervention for anti-social behaviour
- security assistance
- navigation to support lines
- community police assistance.

No doubt providers will be able to add to the lists and we encourage you to share successful actions that have worked for you. It is predicted that the longer the lockdown continues the greater the escalation of anxiety will be. Higher anxiety will result in an increase in poor behaviour. It is in the interest of all providers to work

collaboratively, sharing knowledge and experience, acting in the best interest of our tenants to reduce tenant anxiety.

No interest loans scheme advice

The Salvation Army has provided the following information about its no interest loan scheme. [NILS](#) No Interest Loans are a fair and affordable way for people living on limited incomes to borrow to buy an essential household asset or service.

Information for migrants and refugees

Immigration New Zealand now has Covid-19 migrant and refugee information on its website for settlement service providers, NGOs and community groups to use to support recent migrants and refugees.

[The information is available here.](#)

Immigration New Zealand says settlement service providers, NGOs and community organisations play a critical role in getting messages to migrants and refugees to make sure they have the information they need at this time. [It wants to hear about](#) any concerns or issues specific to recent migrant and former refugee communities.

Immigration New Zealand says the ability to access support in languages other than English is a challenge many recent migrants and refugees are experiencing. Interpreters are available for more than 180 different languages for the Government's Covid-19 helplines.

To get an interpreter:

- Call the government helpline you need
- Ask for an interpreter and tell them the language you speak
- Wait and you will be connected to a professional interpreter who will help you talk to the agency.

The following pages provide key information recent migrants need to know about their visas. Keep checking back as these will be updated with new information.

[Immigration New Zealand | Visa duration extension](#)
[Immigration New Zealand | Student visa holders](#)

Understanding the social impact of Covid-19

The Salvation Army has released its Covid-19 social impact report and dashboard.

These are [available here](#).

The Salvation Army says it is vital to try to capture and quantify the social impacts of this pandemic and lockdown on the poorest and possibly most vulnerable New Zealanders. It hopes that the report, dashboard and analysis will help with developing effective policies and strategies for the looming social challenges.

How is your organisation maintaining services?

What creative things are you doing to continue providing essential housing services for your tenants and others you work with? We know this sector is determined, innovative and community-minded - and we'd love to hear how you're going the extra mile to both maintain services and keep staff safe.

Please email [Cushla Managh](mailto:Cushla.Managh@cha.org.nz) at CHA with examples of what your organisation is doing, and we'll feature these in upcoming issues of this newsletter.